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SUBJECT: GUATEMALAN CONGRESS APPROVES CICIG AS MATTER OF NATIONAL
URGENCY

REF: GUATEMALA 1461 AND PREVIOUS

¶1. Summary: On August 1, the Guatemalan Congress voted to approve the GOG-UN agreement to establish the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) as a matter of national urgency. The agreement will be sent to the Executive for final approval by the president. End summary.

¶2. On August 1, the Guatemalan Congress approved the GOG-UN agreement to establish the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) as a matter of national urgency. The Foreign Affairs Committee had rejected the agreement on July 18 by a narrow margin (13-8), sending it back to plenary for a vote (reftel).

¶3. The CICIG agreement passed by a wide margin, with 110 votes in favor (including UNE and Partido Patriota), 5 in opposition (including Movimiento Reformador), and 5 abstentions. The FRG and the Unionista Party, which opposed CICIG, walked out during the vote. Government officials, political leaders, and civil society groups hailed the decision as ground-breaking in the fight against impunity and insecurity.

¶4. At the beginning of the August 1 session, Congress voted to reject the July 18 recommendation of the Foreign Affairs Committee and to send the agreement to the congressional Human Rights Committee for consideration. Immediately following the vote, which showed a wide margin in favor of CICIG, president of Congress Ruben Dario Morales made the decision to move the agreement forward as a measure of national urgency. The agreement will now be sent to the Executive for final approval by the president.

¶5. It appears that opponents of CICIG made one last ditch effort to close the legislative session before the CICIG vote. A source close to president of Congress Morales told us that the police came to the president's office, telling him that there had been a bomb threat and that he would have to evacuate the building. The police officers were insistent and presented a written "oficio" (demand). Morales thanked them for the warning but decided to hold the vote before telling the legislators of the bomb threat.

¶6. Comment: The vote was the culmination and affirmation of six years of efforts by the U.S. and others in the international community in support of CICIG and its precursor CICIACS. It is now critical that we identify funding for the start-up costs of getting the mission on the ground soonest.